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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 HALIFAX 0010

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TAGS: [PTER](#) [ASEC](#) [PGOV](#) [ETRD](#) [EWWT](#) [CA](#)

SUBJECT: CANADIAN PORT SECURITY MEASURES ANNOUNCED IN HALIFAX

REF: 02 HALIFAX 196

[1](#)1. SENSITIVE BUT UNCLASSIFIED - ENTIRE TEXT.

[1](#)2. (SBU) SUMMARY AND COMMENT: Atlantic Canada and Halifax port officials are satisfied that the Canadian government's port security initiative, announced at a Halifax news conference by four federal cabinet ministers on January 22, is a step in the right direction. Local officials welcomed the government's C\$172 million package but have questions about how much of that money will end up at Halifax port. Moreover, they insist that local efforts to bolster security at this port, such as tightening background checks on port employees and installing high-tech screening systems for incoming marine containers, are already accomplishing many of the objectives laid out in the federal government's five-year plan. They are skeptical that the proposed package will take port security much farther than where the ports are going themselves at their own initiative, and they warn that some of the government's proposed measures fail to focus on the main threat: the possibility of a nuclear or chem-bio device hidden inside a shipping container entering Halifax from overseas but destined for the United States. (END SUMMARY AND COMMENT)

[1](#)3. (SBU) At a press conference on the Halifax waterfront, four federal cabinet ministers---Transport Minister David Collenette, Solicitor General Wayne Easter, Fisheries Minister Robert Thibault, and Customs/Revenue Minister Elinor Caplan---announced the government's plan to spend C\$172 over five years on new computers, scanning equipment, training, and police and Customs services to enhance security at the country's three major ports of Halifax, Vancouver, and Montreal. The government's plan, according to Collenette, will result in increased surveillance of marine traffic, more thorough screening passengers and crew, installation of new detection equipment in ports to screen shipping containers, improvement in the capacity of the RCMP to investigate and respond to potential security breaches, establishment of restricted port areas, and new requirements that port workers undergo thorough background checks.

[1](#)4. (SBU) Officials of Halifax port and Canada Customs in Atlantic Canada told CG that they welcome the government's announcement but are waiting to see how Ottawa will divide up the C\$172 million. They commented that the most acute need is for money to cover the purchase and maintenance of the expensive gamma-ray scanners known as VACIS (Vehicle and Cargo Inspection System) and other new high-tech equipment. Halifax Port Authority officials noted wryly that the port has already been purchasing and installing VACIS scanners, at considerable cost, over the past six months with no help from Ottawa (SEE REFTEL). Our local contacts were somewhat dismayed that the visiting federal ministers seemed unaware that, since the September 11 terrorist attacks, Halifax port and Canada Customs here have been implementing almost all of the measures laid out in the government's five-year plan. For example, Halifax has already placed tighter controls on passengers and crew of visiting ships, established restricted areas within the port, tightened background checks for port employees, and made considerable progress in reinforcing the identification and screening of potentially suspect marine containers coming in to North America through Halifax port. These local initiatives, Halifax officials feel, have received neither recognition nor support from Ottawa.

[1](#)5. (SBU) The one substantial change contained in the federal announcement, according to our contacts, is the decision to augment the role of the RCMP in enforcing port security. Until now, the RCMP here in Halifax has had no personnel permanently assigned at the port. Canada Customs, with support from the two U.S. Customs inspectors who have been seconded here since last year, conducts all investigations and searches. RCMP Inspector Bill Kazmel, the federal policing chief for Nova Scotia, told CG that the government's plan should enable his office to assign at least four RCMP members to full-time duty at the Halifax port. Our local contacts also believe that the key to success will be a determination on the part of the federal government to ensure an equitable division of resources and coordination among the six agencies that will have to work together at the port: RCMP, Transport Canada, Canada Customs, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, CSIS, and the Department of Fisheries and Oceans.

[1](#)6. (SBU) A few local officials told CG they doubted that the amount of money announced by the federal ministers will make a difference, noting that C\$172 million over five years amounts to

only C\$34 million per year, and that sum has to be spread among six agencies at three different ports.

17. (SBU) Finally, our contacts warned that some of the government's measures---those that focus on perimeter security at the port facility itself and background checks for longshoremen---were missing the point: the main security threat at Halifax port does not emanate from local individuals coming onto port property, but rather from shipping containers coming in from overseas. In light of the post-September 11 terrorism dangers, port security efforts should not focus on protecting foreign container ships from attack by local elements in Halifax, which is unlikely, but instead should focus on protecting North America from a potential hazard---such as a nuclear or biological device---that might conceivably be hidden inside a container coming from overseas. Halifax handles more than half a million incoming shipping containers every year, approximately 100,000 of which are in transit for destinations in the United States.

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